



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

September 23, 2010

Ms. Sharon Alexander
Associate General Counsel
Texas Department of Transportation
125 East 11th Street
Austin, Texas 78701-2483

OR2010-14476

Dear Ms. Alexander:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 399665.

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received a request for information relating to a project on Interstate Highway 20 where a named individual was killed.¹ You state that some of the requested information either has been or will be released. You seek to withhold the submitted information under section 552.111 of the Government Code and section 409 of title 23 of the United States Code. We have considered your arguments and reviewed the submitted information.²

We first note that the submitted information falls within the scope of section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a)(1) provides for required public disclosure of "a completed report, audit, evaluation, or investigation made of, for, or by a governmental

¹You inform us that the department sought and received clarification of the request. See Gov't Code § 552.222(b) (governmental body may communicate with requestor for purpose of clarifying or narrowing request for information).

²This letter ruling assumes that the submitted representative sample of information is truly representative of the requested information as a whole. This ruling neither reaches nor authorizes the department to withhold any information that is substantially different from the submitted information. See Gov't Code §§ 552.301(e)(1)(D), .302; Open Records Decision Nos. 499 at 6 (1988), 497 at 4 (1988).

body,” unless the information is expressly confidential under other law or excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. Gov’t Code § 552.022(a)(1). Although you seek to withhold the submitted information under section 552.111 of the Government Code, that section is a discretionary exception to disclosure that protects a governmental body’s interests and may be waived. *See id.* § 552.007; Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 470 at 7 (1987) (statutory predecessor to Gov’t Code § 552.111 subject to waiver). As such, section 552.111 is not other law that makes information confidential for the purposes of section 552.022. Therefore, the department may not withhold any of the submitted information under section 552.111 of the Government Code.

You also contend, however, that the submitted information is confidential under section 409 of title 23 of the United States Code, which is “other law” for the purposes of section 552.022. *See In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328 (Tex. 2001); *see also Pierce County v. Guillen*, 123 S.Ct. 720 (2003) (upholding constitutionality of section 409, relied on by county in denying request under state’s Public Disclosure Act). Section 409 provides that:

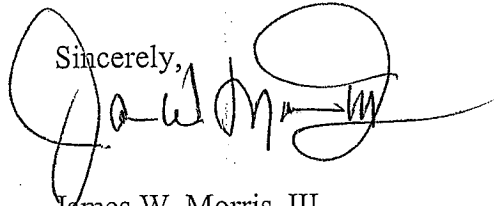
[n]otwithstanding any other provision of law, reports, surveys, schedules, lists, or data compiled or collected for the purpose of identifying, evaluating, or planning the safety enhancement of potential accident sites, hazardous roadway conditions, or railway-highway crossings, pursuant to sections 130, 144, and 152 of this title or for the purpose of developing any highway safety construction improvement project which may be implemented utilizing Federal-aid highway funds shall not be subject to discovery or admitted into evidence in a Federal or State court proceeding or considered for other purposes in any action for damages arising from any occurrence at a location mentioned or addressed in such reports, surveys, schedules, lists, or data.

23 U.S.C. § 409. You state that Interstate Highway 20 is part of the national highway system under section 103 of title 23 of the United States Code and is therefore a federal-aid highway for the purposes of section 409 of title 23. You explain that the submitted information was generated for highway safety purposes. Based on your representations and our review of the information at issue, we conclude that the submitted information is confidential under section 409 of title 23 of the United States Code and must be withheld from the requestor on that basis.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php, or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J W Morris III', with a large, stylized flourish extending from the end.

James W. Morris, III
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JWM/em

Ref: ID# 399665

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)